

Just and Learning Culture in North West – Guiding Principles – June 2021

Background

Discussions in the North West SPF consistently show a strong desire to develop and sustain a restorative just and learning culture for people working in the NHS across the region.

Principles

Informed by the above, employers and trade unions working in partnership through the NW SPF have agreed the following-guiding principles, as suggested good practice across the region:

- Everyone should be encouraged to live the values of compassion and kindness with colleagues, every day
- Colleagues should be able to work in an environment where they feel supported and empowered to learn when things don't go as expected, through restorative practice
- Colleagues should be encouraged to speak the truth about something which didn't go to plan, without fear of punitive individual repercussions
- In the case of an adverse event, employers should not instinctively ask 'who' was to blame but 'what' led the event to occur
- Formal disciplinary processes and suspensions should be avoided wherever possible, in favour of explorative conversations, to include discussions about all personal responsibility processes, which are informal and fair, adhering to just and learning principles
- It is never too late to reconsider the correct approach to an employment relations issue, and consider alternative resolution outside of formal disciplinary and grievance processes
- When there is a need for formal processes, they should be undertaken compassionately, begin with an investigation of the facts around what went wrong and be undertaken in a timely manner
- Just and learning culture should not be mistaken for an uncritical culture where 'anything goes' – which can be as harmful and inexcusable as a 'blame culture'
- Whilst the concept of just and learning culture pre-dates the pandemic, COVID-19 has only further emphasised the importance of treating people as human beings, and a just culture naturally aligns with this mindset
- In addition to creating the culture we aspire to for the good of our colleagues; employers should recognise the potential to save time and money that can be reinvested, as a result of reduced disciplinarys, suspensions and workforce turnover (based on Mersey Care data)
- Wherever possible, the natural links and alignment should be drawn between the development of just and learning restorative culture locally, and the national expectations around culture as directed by NHS Chief People Officer.

Whilst the NW SPF is hopeful all employers will consider embedding a local policy reflective of the above, the principles also outline a broader attitude/mindset, constructive for all to reflect on in their day to day work at a time when the NHS is at its most challenged.

Signed by the Joint Chairs of the North West SPF:

Mike Gibney, The Walton Centre

James Bull, UNISON